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1 November 1961

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: World Reaction to US Resumption of Atmospheric
Nuclear Testing

1. World reaction to a US decision to resume atmospheric nuclear testing would generally be solemn, but in only a few cases indignant. Most countries would look upon such a US decision as an inevitable response to the long and highly publicized Soviet test program. It should be noted, however, that the Soviet tests, and particularly the 30 and 50 megaton shots, have dramatically revived international fears about fall-out, and that atmospheric testing itself may come to be viewed with greater revulsion and opprobrium than other aspects of the arms race.

2. Our principal allies would probably endorse a resumption of atmospheric tests as necessary both on military grounds and as a rejoinder to Soviet intimidation. The UK has already indicated it would support such a US decision, if the military necessity for testing could be demonstrated. France, anxious to divert public attention from its own program, would not protest, nor is West Germany likely to do so despite its long

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record of sensitivity on the testing issue. Canada has already indicated it appreciates US forbearance to date and would probably understand a decision to resume testing. The Scandinavian countries would not welcome such a US decision, but would probably not object publicly.

3. Much of the rest of the world is primarily concerned with escaping the consequences of further testing. The non-Western nations by and large would tend to view a resumption of US tests as increasing the levels of radiation danger to which they are exposed rather than as a legitimate response to Soviet provocation.

4. Reactions in the non-Western world might be muted at first, particularly if our program were announced as being composed of low-yield weapons and of short duration. As a US test program proceeded, however, the non-Western nations would be more concerned with the cumulative effects on the atmosphere of Soviet and US tests combined than with the questions of who had begun the tests, or which nation had released the dirtiest nuclear explosions. If the US were to test high-yield weapons, it is likely that world opinion, apart from the Western allies of the US, would quickly abandon any tendency to distinguish between Soviet and US responsibilities for resumption of atmospheric testing.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: General Cabell

The attached memorandum represents some ONE views regarding international reactions to possible US resumption of atmospheric testing. It is submitted for your information in conjunction with the related item on tomorrow's NSC agenda.

Sherman Kent
AD/NE

1 Nov 61
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.